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Concerned with the study of lexical changes, this unit for grade 9 is intended to develop the student's understanding of several specific ways in which the meanings of words change, of the interpersonal relationships and the social values which cause such change, and of general concepts related to language change. Discussion questions, lectures, and examples are provided to help students see (1) how a word differs from its referent, (2) how referential meaning differs from expressive meaning, (3) how changes in the status of a referent or changes in literary customs cause degradation and elevation of meaning, (4) how the Norman invasion caused simultaneously the degradation of an English word and the elevation of a French word with the same referent, (5) how radiation of meaning occurs, and (6) how euphemism, hyperbole, and folk etymology occur. Worksheets and tests for the unit are provided. (JS)

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Unit 902

Changes in the Meanings of Words

ED 027324

CAUTIONARY NOTE

These materials are for experimental use by Project English fellows and their associates who contributed to their development.

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MATERIALS NEEDED

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Dean, Leonard F. and Wilson, Kenneth G. Essays on Language and Usage (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.)

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INTRODUCTION

This unit is concerned with the study of how and why changes occur in the meanings of words. It is hoped that the unit will develop understandings of several specific ways in which the meanings of words change; of the interpersonal relationships and the social values which cause such change; and of some general concepts related to change in language which have wider application outside the content of this unit. Additional value may lie in peripheral understandings. For example, the student may gain understandings of certain aspects of the history of his language; develop a greater tolerance for and understanding of the different meanings of words which he encounters in earlier works of literature; or develop an awareness of the richness of the vocabulary of his language.

A number of comments need tobe made about the general procedures outlined in the unit. The unit is designed for an inductive classroom technique. The problems with developing materials for inductive teaching are numerous and obvious. A few qualifying remarks are therefore in order. The lecture sections and transitional sections of the unit are artificial. The writers of the unit quite naturally render these passages in written style and thereby make them too formal for classroom reading. They are meant only as suggestions. The same general statement must be made about the discussion questions contained in the unit The teacher should freely change these suggested remarks and questions to suit himself.

The sample responses to the discussion questions in the unit share the artificiality of the lecture materials. Students will seldom respond in the ways indicated and the teacher will frequently need to use additional questions to bring students to the desired understanding. Students will seldom arrive at precisely the answer outlined, but it is hoped that they will be able to approach the desired response. In some cases, the teacher notes suggest that leading questions are likely to be necessary.

A few additional comments concerning the general format should be made. The left hand colum of each page contains notes for the teacher regarding procedures, organization, and assignments. Two types of these notes deserve special mention. Summaries of sections of the unit are marked and should be emphasized. The word ATTENTION is used throughout the unit to mark points where important generalizations are made. The teacher should also attempt to emphasize these points appropriately.

In terms of specific subject matter, this unit deals with the systematic description of various types of lexical change, ignoring the systematic treatment of the history of these changes. Such treatments can be found in units 905 and 1201. The major focus here is on developing a taxonomy for describing various types of lexical change. The unit deals with degradation, elevation, radiation, euphemism, hyperbole, and popular (folk) etymology.

Sample Introduction Procedure:
Write on chalkboard:

The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Sample Discussion Question:

These conclusions are best reached by means of discussion. The teacher will need to ask a series of leading questions which will help students to see the folly of taking the statement literally.

1. What is the literal meaning of this saying?

   (Obviously, the listener does not have to eat the pudding to prove that it is pudding. Other clues--general appearance, color, texture, odor, etc.--are sufficient to "prove" that the substance is indeed pudding. It soon becomes apparent that if we are to make any sense out of the saying, we must assume that "proof" did not mean, at the time the saying originated, what we mean when we used the word proof now. In fact, it meant "test"; if we say that the test of the quality of the pudding is in the eating, we begin to make sense out of the saying.)

Sample Summary

The fact that proof has not always had the same meaning points to an interesting fact about the words in our language: the meanings of the words can and do change. The study of how and why the meanings of words change will be our concern in this unit.

Sample Lecture-Discussion

Degradation and Elevation

One of the simplest and most common ways in which a word can change in meaning is to "lose status."

Sample Discussion Questions

2. Typically we use "status" when referring to people; when used in this way, what does the term mean?

   (A person has a particular social position in relation to others in his society.)

3. How can a student gain status in a high school?

   (Get an A on a test; make the football team; be elected to the student council; develop a reputation for fashionable dress; etc.)

4. How can he lose status?

   (Fail a test; be ostracized by a high clique; etc.)

5. What are some of the factors that determine a status in the total society?

   (Occupation, wealth, skill in given fields of endeavor, notoriety, etc.)

Sample Summary

It should be obvious that a person can change status. An unknown student with relatively low status can gain status by becoming the hero on the football team; an adult may gain status by taking on a new position of prominence in business, politics, etc. On the otherhand, a person can lose status: an ex-champion boxer may go unrecognized by a public that formerly gave him much attention and praise; a person in business or politics may be 'demoted' and suddenly lose status.

Over the period of centuries (or merely decades) certain occupations and the people involved in those occupations have lost or gained status.

Sample Discussion Questions

6. Can you think of some examples of this change?

   (Scientist--from madman producing monsters to benefactor of society; doctor--from quack and grave robber to lifesaver; farmer--from the dominant class in a primarily rural society to a minority class in our modern urban society; skilled craftsman--have disappeared in some cases and have lost their importance in others, for example, silversmiths and shoemakers.)

7. Now let us transfer these concepts of status to words. We find that some words have higher or lower status--social position, so to speak--than others. Which of these two words seems to have a higher status than the other: <u>chef</u> or <u>cook</u>?

Sample Summary

(<u>Chef</u>. Many other examples are also suitable.)

<u>Remember</u>: We are speaking here of the <u>words</u>--the person named by <u>chef</u> or <u>cook</u> is carrying out essentially

Sample Summary Continued

the same work no matter which word we use to name him. Chef, however, seems to "sound better," have higher status than cook. If words can have status, it is not surprising that they can lose status. When this process occurs, we say that the word has undergone degradation.

Before we discuss degradation, however, we should recognize a characteristic of our use of language which is sometimes related to changes in meaning of this kind.

PROCEDURE:

Here the teacher may use the device of handing or throwing a piece of chalk to a member of the class and asking, "What did I throw to you?" The student will reply, in most cases, "A piece of chalk." This the teacher can deny, saying, "No," I threw you...(indicating the piece of chalk)." This process will probably repeat itself and become a full-fledged argument until the students see the difference between the object (piece of chalk) and the words which symbolize it ("piece of chalk").

Sample Lecture

There are many explanations for our confusion of word and thing. One writer has suggested that the confusion goes back to an early stage in our speech-learning when we think the thing is the word and vice versa. A parent says, "This is a door," and for a while the child identifies the door and the sound, "door." Later, of course, he learns that the name is a name for a category ("door" stands not for this door, that door, etc., but for a category).

Sample Lecture Continued

Another explanation for our confusion of word and thing is the fact that the possession of the word often suggests the possession of the thing--or at least knowledge of it. For example, if a boy claimed to know a great deal about cars but could not understand what we mean when we refer to "cams" or "overhead valves," we would think him a fraud. If he uses these words correctly and easily, plus dozens of other words of a similar nature, we believe he <u>is</u> an expert. If a girl uses the names of dozens of spices which are unknown to other girls or t boys, we assume that she has used the spices when cooking, can identify their odors and tastes, etc. In other words, possession of the word implies a kind of "possession" of the thing. This confusion of the word and the thing often has religious or superstitious significance, a point we will take up again later in the unit.

Note:
Point out here that it is usually the person who is <u>not</u> an expert himself who makes this assumption.
It can often be found that a person can verbalize fluently without actually being knowledgeable or "expert."

At present, we are more interested in the logical consequences of this confusion of words and things with regard to degradation.

Sample Discussion Question

1. What might happen to a word, given the tendency to confuse words and things, if the thing a word refers to loses status?

   (The word might also lose status.)

Summary

The following words provide examples of the way that this tendency has operated to change the meaning of words:

NOTE: Examples are furnished in summary form and may be expanded freely by the teacher. Simplified etymologies are furnished for teacher use.

Villain (Fr. vilein, vilain) once meant "farm-laborer." The Norman noblemen who ruled England after 1066 then used the word to mean "a contemptible person, not belonging to the (Norman) nobility." The word then took on the meaning "a low fellow known for his low conduct, language, and thoughts"; finally the word came to mean "a morally wicked person"(no matter what his rank or occupation).

boer - "farmer," went through a similar process of degradation so that they now suggest "an ill-mannered, rude, stupid person" (not necessarily one involved in agriculture).

Counterfeit - once meant simple "a copy, imitation," but has become degraded to refer only to "illegal copy" (money, signatures,etc.)

Knave (cf. Ger. knabe) once meant "boy"; since many servants were boys, the word came to mean "servant"; finally, since many servants were regarded as "dishonest and untrustworthy, the word came to mean "a scoundrel."

Sophist - originally meant a "wise teacher," but after Plato attacked the Sophists for their improper use of argument, the word often came to mean "one who reasons badly or adulterates his reasoning with poor arguments or incorrect facts." From this last meaning we get sophisticated, "unspoiled." The last word then underwent degradation, too, because "unspoiled" became equated with "lacking in wordly knowledge, manners, etc." This is an interesting series: First sophist became degraded from its original high status to a low status. Since its negative would then have a high status, the derived word, unsophisticated, had originally a high status. But it too became degraded to a low status (while its negative, sophisticated, rose to a high status.)

Summary

These are all examples of cases where the thing to which a word referred has lost status and, consequently the words themselves have lost status or degraded in their meanings.

Sample Discussion Questions

2. Does it seem to you that, inall the cases we have discussed, the loss of status which the word undergoes is equivalent to the loss of status of the thing to which the word referred?

Sample Discussion Questions

(No. In fact, in most cases the words have suffered a worse fate than the things to which they referred. Farm laborers, for example, currently hold a much higher status in the society than do "villains.")

3. How could we account for this phenomenon?

(The explanation for this fact lies precisely in the fact that words are not the things they name. Therefore, though the farm laborer may suffer only a limited loss of status the terms used to refer to him, once started downhill may continue to lose status indefinitely.)

ATTENTION

Another cause of degradation involves changes in literary conventions or customs. In this type of degradation words of a certain kind are found to be too rough or crude to be used in certain contexts, even though they may originally have been used in such contexts quite freely.

Sample Discussion Questions

4. Which of these sentences, for example, do you think a modern writer would be most likely to use if he wished to cause the reader to respond sympathetically toward a given character?

Write on the Chalkboard

a) "She blubbered, and brine spouted from her eyes."

b) "She sobbed softly, and tears rolled down her cheeks."

(Sentence b)

5. Which words do you think make sentence (a) inappropriate if the writer wishes us to respond sympathetically?

(Blubbered, brine, and spouted.)

Sample Summary

All three of these words, however, were once used by writers in poetic descriptions, and were intended to cause sympathetic responses.

Similarly, the liver was once thought to be the residence or location of courage and passion; thus

Sample Summary Continued

"liver" was used poetically and was considered to be a dignified word. Today "liver" lacks dignity and could not be used as it once was used in poetry--the meaning has changed little in denotation (the word still names the same body organ) but has changed much in connotation (lacks dignity). "White-livered" and "lily-livered," however, meaning "cowardly," still suggest the old meaning that the word once carried.

ATTENTION
Important Distinction

Notice that the <u>things</u> named by these words have suffered no loss of status; the degradation, the loss of dignity, the loss of status happened to the <u>words</u> because of changing literary tastes. Notice also that there is little or no change in the <u>denotative</u> meanings of these words. In most cases, the changes occur in the <u>connotative</u> meanings of the words.

The teacher may have to recall for students the difference between denotative and connotative meaning.

The causes for the degradation of the meanings of words can be more complex, however, than the rather obvious ones which we have already discussed. Let me ask you to look at these sentences.

Write on the chalkboard

She is innocent as a lamb.

He is an innocent.

Sample Discussion Questions:

6. Does the word innocent have the same meaning in these sentences?

   (No.)

7. What does it mean in each of the sentences?

   (In the first sentence it means "guiltless"; in the second it means unknowing or ignorant.)

Here, then, is a word that currently seems to be undergoing degradation. The causes of degradation that we have discussed so far do not seem to provide adequate explanations for this change. People who are innocent in the sense of the first of these sentences have not lost status in our society. People who are innocent in the sense of the second sentence, however, have.

Sample Discussion Question

8. How could we explain this change in meaning?

(Students will probably not be able to provide a very satisfactory answer to this question at this point. The discussion should be allowed to develop for a time. When it appears to be stymied the teacher can develop the following illustrative example.)

Summary Statement

Perhaps we could understand this change better if we looked at a word that has undergone a very similar change. The word "silly" is such a word. "Silly" once meant "blessed," "happy," "blissful," "holy." Its meaning then became "helpless" or "defenseless," and finally became "foolish" or "feebleminded." What seems to have happened in this case is that the simplicity of the holy or happy person or thing led people to consider him or it as helpless, and, eventually as foolish because of this helplessness.

The same sort of shift seems to be taking place currently with the word innocent. The change in meaning typified by the changes in these words inolves such a complete shift in the connotative and denotative meanings of the terms that determining the causes becomes a very complicated job, usually necessitating a careful study of the history of the word. This is particularly true since

Summary Statement Continued

these words are not directly related to groups of people or things which have obviously lost status. For our purposes it will suffice to say that the things to which these words refer and the connotations of these words are of a lower status than were their original referents and connotations.

Other examples of this type of degradation are: "cunning" (from A. S. cunnan, 'know, be able'; cf. can, Scot ken) originally meant "knowing, skillful." "Crafty" meant "skillful, especially in a craft." "Sly" (from Scan.) meant "wise, skillful." All three words became degraded to suggest knowledge or skill of an under-handed or illegal nature. (Suggested summary: re-define degradation; clear up any misunderstandings about the term; review the various causes of degradation.)

Summary

Note the shift in American usage from "drunk" to "drank" as the past tense form of "drink", especially among women speakers.

Suggested Discussion

Note: Explain as necessary by referring to the article, "On Accepting Participial Drank" by Harold Allen in Readings in Applied English Linguistics, (N.Y.: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1958), pp. 171-174.

9. Can you explain this change in terms of degradation?

(Because of mistaken identification of participial drunk with adjectival drunk, the former becomes degraded and is replaced with drank.)

Suggested Activity:

Students may wish to attempt to compile a list of words in their own vocabulary which are now undergoing degradation (e.g., "fix," by means of association with the "fix" of the dope addict or the threat, "We'll fix him.").

Pass out Worksheet #1

Worksheet #1 should be used in compiling this list.

Unit 902
Worksheet #1

10A

Name_____

DEGRADATION OF WORDS

In doing this exercise try to classify the cause of degradation a being (1) linked to a change in the status of the thing named, (2) linked to a change in literary conventions, or (3) complex. In filling out the "cause of degradation" column begin by entering the appropriate number (1, 2, 3) and then state very briefly what reason you had for so classifying the cause of degradation. One example is provided for your examination.

WORD	OLD MEANING	NEW MEANING	CAUSE FOR DEGRADATION
farmer	one who farms	boor or clod	1 - in urban society farmer does lose status and so does word.

Suggested Activity For More Able Students

Ask students to write a short paper discussing the following statement about degradation taken from The Development of Modern English by Stuart Robinson and F. G. Cassidy

> "It is scarcely a far-fetched interpretation to see in the narrowing of demure to apply to mock modesty, of genteel to spurious gentility, of sophistication to wordly wisdom, of egregious to notoriety rather than fame, of sanctimonious to pretended holiness, and of grandiose to tinsel (itself an example of degradation) grandeur--to see in all these and the dozens of others that might be mentioned, the workings of human motives like suspicion, contempt, and general pessimism."

In doing this exercise students should be free to agree or diagree with the statement.

Sample Lecture-Discussion

Words can lose status or become degraded, as we have seen; but words can also change in another direction.

During the rise to importance of monarchies in Europe, the titles of royal servants rose from very lowly positions to high positions as the servants themselves became important and influential in royal households.

"Marshall," (horse-boy), "constable," (stall-attendant), "chamberlain" (servant in charge of the chambers), and "steward" (not certain--apparently a household servant) all became important court titles--and many still are (e.g., Lord High Steward of England). "Constable" (in France) and "marshall" became high military and peace-officer titles. "Steward" had the distinction of being modified to the royal family name "Stuart" in England. (Earlier members of the family were stewards.) The later decline in monarchies resulted in some

degradation of their terms in the direction of their original meanings, but the terms still have a higher status than they originally had, (with the possible exception of some uses of the modern "steward").

ATTENTION

Important term

All of these terms have risen in status. We call this process <u>elevation</u>.

<u>Elevation</u>

Sample Discussion Questions

1. What was the first cause of degradation that we discussed?

   (The thing referred to by a word lost status and as it did, so did the word that named it.)

2. How would you explain the elevation of the terms we have just discussed?

   (The thing referred to by a word gained a higher status, and as it did, so did the word that named it.)

ATTENTION

Sample Summary

In other words, a change in the status of a given thing, in either direction, may cause a change in the status of the word naming that thing.

Additional examples of elevation indicate that other causes of degradation can operate also to elevate words. "Pioneer," for example, once referred to the lowest army personnel who went ahead of the army to do the dirty work or clearing the way for the soldiers. Later the term was applied metaphorically to settlers who "cleared the way" in a new colony, eventually becoming elevated to a title of praise.

ATTENTION

Important generalization

<u>Here a change in the literary customs involving this word led to a elevation rather than degradation.</u> Note especially the high value placed on the term by Americans with regard to our frontier--or more recently,

Summary Continued

the "pioneers" of space exploration, science, etc.

We noticed earlier that "silly" has undergone sever degradation. An interesting contrast is the word "nice," which has undergone drastic elevation. "Nice" originally meant "foolish," especially about trifles or small things. It then changed to mean "trivial, unimportant" (referring to the object), then "particular about small things, accurate" (referring again to the agent), then "good, discriminator, observer," and finally "excellent, good, rated highly among its kind" (referring to either object or agent.)

Another interesting variety of elevation involves the nicknames given to a group of people by other persons who wish to embarrass or make fun of the group. In some instances, (e.g., "Yankee," "Hoosier," "Quaker"), the group accepts the nickname proudly and its use becomes widespread. As a result, many of these names lose their derogatory meanings and become elevated.

NOTE: At this point, a summary of elevation may be necessary, including a re-definition of the elevation and a discussion of any of the examples in order to clear up any possible confusion.

Sample Lecture

Until now we have looked at individual words which have undergone degradation or elevation. This is only natural, since we are examining the ways in which the meanings of words change. Most of these changes developed independently, each word changing because of a particular

Sample Lecture Cont'd.

condition or event which influenced its use. There is, however, a large number of words which underwent degradation or elevation at about the same time in the history of our language and because of a single condition. This condition existed in England following the Norman invasion and conquest. French-speaking Normans conquered Anglo-Saxon England in 1066, and for the next several centuries Norman French mingled with Anglo-Saxon to create Middle English, which in turn developed into Modern English. Norman French was brought to England primarily by the new rulers, the Norman noblemen, who looked down upon the Anglo-Saxons as their cultural inferiors. Because of this attitude, the Normans insisted upon the use of their language in government and military affairs. The Anglo-Saxons, however, were proud of their language and it continued to be the language of the common man.

These points may be developed inductively if the student's background in English history is adequate.

Sample Discussion Questions

3. What do you suppose happened when, under these conditions, two words referring to the same thing, one French, one English, were being used at the same time? How do you think degradation and elevation would operate under these conditions?

   (The French word would tend to elevate; the English word would tend to degrade.)

4. Why would this happen?

   (Since the French-speaking people held the high status positions in the society, and, consequently, their words for various things acquired a higher status. Conversely, the English-speaking people were regarded to the lower status positions in the society, and their words for various things lost status.)

If students are unable to answer this question at this point, the teacher should provide an example and ask the students to judge which word has elevated, and which has degraded. The "hut"- cottage pair would work nicely in this case. After discussing this the teacher can restate the original question.

Summary Statement

In other words, even though a pair of words may have originally named the same thing, their meanings changed because of their respective cultural "tags." The Anglo-Saxon word would become degraded, and the French word would become elevated. The main change, then, was in the connotation of the word, although later changes occured in the denotation as well. (This process was reinforced by later deliberate borrowings from French in the period during which France was the cultural, political and military leader among Western nations.) One of the results of this process was the increase in size of the vocabulary of English. The list of pairs of words--one French, the other Anglo-Saxon--

This concept may need expansion.

which had originally the same meanings would seem endless. Some examples are:

Examples:

"hut" (from A.S.) and "cottage" (French) originally meant the same thing: "A small, crude dwelling." "Hut" now refers to a hastily built, crude shelter such as the neighborhood boys might build out of cardboard and old lumber, whereas "cottage" refers to a highly respectable status-symbol that we most often build on lake-shore property. Nine hundred years ago the terms were interchangeable, but they are not today because one has degraded and the other has elevated.

We may "eat" from (A.S.), but if we wish to sound more elegant, we "dine" (from French).

If a women's clothing shop wishes to sound fashionable if offers for some of its customers not a "small" (from A. S.) size but a "petite" (French) size.

Summary Statement

The most striking division of synonyms on the basis of an equation of "Anglo-Saxon" with "crude" and of "French" with "cultivated" is the group of words which name body parts or functions. The Anglo-Saxon words are

Summary Continued

systematically treated as obscenities not to be used in polite society--despite the fact that the French word and the Anglo-Sazon word have indentical denotative values. Here the Anglo-Saxon words have undergone severe degradation while the French words have, if anything, undergone elevation.

The wholesale degradation and elevation of terms caused by the Norman Invasion is an unusual occurrence in the history of our language. This is not our only reason for discussing it, however. It is worth discussing because the reason for the change in status of the words involved is a little different than any of the reasons we have thus far discussed. We now know that such changes can sometimes be attributed to change in the status of the people using the words rather than in the status of the things named by the words.

In our own society this kind of change is not unusual.

Sample Discussion Question

Write the sentence on the chalkboard.

5. What special meaning does the word "beat" have when it is applied to an individual, as in the sentence: "He is beat, man"?

   (It means that the person in question is, or appears to be, a "beatnik," or a person who is rebelling against certain conventions of a society.

When this term is used by a person who is, himself, a "beat" or "beatnik" it is complimentary, but if the speaker is not a "beat," the term usually has a derogatory connotation. In this special case, the meaning of the term has degraded because the group using the term to

describe itself has low status.

Sample Discussion Question

6. If the "beats" should produce poetry which the society comes to agree is "great poetry," what do you think will happen to the term "beat" when used to describe the person involved?

(It will elevate.)

Summary

If you think back to our discussion of the elevation of terms like "Yankee" and "Quaker," you'll realize that this would not be an unusual development in the life of a word.

This leads us to one final point which should be made about degradation and elevation: they are not irreversible but can change in one direction and then reverse so as to change in the other direction. "Naughty," for example, first meant "destitute, good-for-nothing," with little or no moral judgment being made by the use of the word. The term then became a synonym for "bad" (which involves a moral judgment); it became further degraded to mean "morally reprobat, wicked." At this point the process reversed itself, and the term became slightly elevated to mean "sportive" (of older persons) or "troublesome" (of children)--with none of the strong moral condemnation of the previous meaning. The same kinds of changes may well occur with the word "beat" used in the special sense that we have been discussing.

RADIATION

Sample Introduction

Words sometimes act like a magician's trick or being in too places at once. Very few words have just

Introduction Continued

one unchangeable meaning. One word may have a general, core meaning, but users of the word find that they can apply the word to a number of situations. These separate uses of the word will be distinct from the other uses of the same word, but we can always trace back to a simple, primal meaning. An example will help you to understand this idea more clearly.

Write "head" on the chalkboard

Look at this word: HEAD

Discussion

1. What would you say is the simplest, most direct meaning of this word?

   (The meaning which indicates a part of the body of a person or animal.)

2. What other meanings of this word can you think of?

   (The side of a coin bearing the representation of a head; an individual (usually in the plural; a hundred head of cattle); the top or front of almost anything; a director or leader; the foam on a glass of beer; the striking surface of a drum, a toilet (Navy jargon); the source of a stream; mental prowness; a certain necessary quantity of steam; main points in a discourse; a headline (newspaper jargon); etc.)

The teacher will need to ask leading questions in order to elicit all of these responses from the students. List the various responses on the chalkboard.

A word that has this usefulness is like a starfish or sunburst; it has a core idea, and it has secondary 'rays' that are distinct from the core but which still share part of the central idea. The word which is used to describe this kind of change in meaning is radiation. The secondary meanings of the word are said to radiate from its central meaning. A diagram may help you to see this.

At this point project transparency #1. (see Appendix) on the screen.

Use overlay 1.a. (see Appendix)

Let's place the various meanings of the word "head at the ends of the rays in our diagram.

Sample Discussion Question

3. Now that we have diagrammed the radiated meanings of the word "head", can we come up with a basic, simple theme-idea that seems relevant to most of the uses of the word that we have suggested?

(The meaning which indicates the foremost or uppermost part of anything.)

Use overlay 1.b (see Appendix)

Let's put this common core of meaning at the center of our diagram. It is from this center or "hub" that the other meanings radiated.

Suggested Activity

Following this group work, students should be furnished with dittoed copies of transparency 1 and told to make a radiation wheel of other words, possibly POWER GROUND FORCE HARD. The sheets of dictionary entries for these words should be distributed for the students to work from.

Dictionary entries for these words should be taken from Standard College Dictionary--Harcourt, Brace and World (Funk and Wagnalls)

At the conclusion of this individual work, students might give orally a sampling of the radiated meanings and the generalized, core meaning of the words that they worked on.

Discussion

If we think about the process of radiation a bit more, we can see that some of the secondary or radiated meanings of words can undergo still further radiations of meanings. In the case of the word "head," for example, the sense of the "top" of anything immediately divides into that which resembles the human head in (1) shape, or (2) position. Each of these senses may radiate in several directions. Thus form (1) we have the head of a pin, of a nail, of a barrell, of a pimple; from (2) the head of a table, of a hall, of a printed page. Some of these meanings can then be radiated still further. The head of the table for instance, may indicate position of the person who sits in that position.

Discussion Continued

Perhaps another example involving the same word, "head," will make the way secondary radiation words even clearer. Let's consider the further radiations of the word "head" in the sense of the leader or leadership.

Sample Discussion Questions:

The teacher may need to use leading questions to elicit these responses.

4. Can you provide me with some examples of the word head where the meaning seems to derive from the idea that the head is someone who is at the front of or on top of a group of people?

   (A head coach, department heads, the heads of a procession, of an army, of a class, of a revolt, of a reform movement, of a new school of philosophy.)

5. All of these phrases suggest personal leadership but do they seem to have reference to the same thing in each case?

   (No.)

6. How do the meanings differ?

   (The degree of leadership and the relationship to the people being led is different in each case.)

7. If these various senses of this special sense of the word "head" share a common meaning, but also exhibit distinctive and different meanings, what process can we say that they have undergone.

   (Radiation.)

Apparentl then, it is possible for people to lead a word far away from its central meaning as they have need to.

Suggested Activity

On the back of your dittoed radiation exercise sheets, make another (abbreviated) radiation of one of these secondary "cores of meaning." That is, use as a core one of the radiated meanings of the words "power," "ground," "force," and "hard."

Sample Discussion Questions
(For use in discussing the preceding activity)

8. Does the basic meaning of the word as it under goes a second radiation get very far from the original idea of the meaning?

   (Yes, but its connection to the core meaning is still recognizable and can be played on. Puns are an example of this.)

9. If a word can be used in so many different ways what must we pay close attention to when we hear someone use a word that has radiated meanings?

   (Denotative - connotative or referential - expressive categories.)

10. If meanings of words "radiate" how can we understand each other?

    (The particular meaning is indicated by the context and the apparent intent of the speaker.)

Suggested Lecture - Discussion

Euphemism

We will now look at another manner in which the meanings of words change, one with which you have had more personal experiences. Let us imagine that a friend of yours is approaching and that you have not seen this particular friend since the death of his father two weeks earlier. Let us assume that you feel, quite naturally, that you should express your sympathy. After greeting the friend, you say, "I was very sorry to hear that your father..."

Sample Discussion Questions

1. How would you finish the statement?

   (Get several responses; place them on the chalkboard.)

2. Do you feel that the expression "kicked the bucket" would be proper?

   (No.)

3. Why would such an expression seem improper?

(The friend has had a shock and a personal loss; he should not be hurt with witticisms; such an expression would seem cruel, unfeeling; etc.)

Place following sentences on chalkboard: "He had died" "He has passed away."

In other words, we do not use blunt expressions such as "died" or "is dead" and slang such as "kicked the bucket" under these circumstances even though they refer to something--death--which is an experience known to us all. Instead we try to "soften" the idea for our friend by using such expressions as ...

(Point to the euphemisms listed on the chalkboard.) Notice that we have said the same thing, in one way when we say "He has died," and "He has passed away," but we have not said the same thing if we look at the two sentences in another way. The difference is the difference between referential meaning and expressive meaning. When the words name something in the external world, they are referential. When the words reveal an internal state, the emotions and feelings, of the speaker, they are expressive. In our two sentences, both have the same referential meaning--they both refer to the state of death. But they have different expressive meanings; the second sentence reveals a feeling of the speaker, the feeling of compassion, sympathy; the first sentence is "neutral"--it expresses no feeling of the speaker. What of the sentence, "He has kicked the bucket?"

Place underlined terms on chalkboard.

NOTE: This section on Referential-Expressive language can be shortened if students have recently become acquainted with the concepts in earlier units.

Sample Discussion Questions

4. What is its referential meaning?

   (Same as that of the other two.)

5. Does it have expressive meaning?

(Yes; expresses lack of sympathy, callousness, etc.) What we are talking about here, then, is the selection of an expressive meaning. Our referential meaning has been selected--we are going to refer to death, but we still have several choices of expressive meanings: we can reveal our sympathy, we can reveal no emotion, or we can reveal a lack of sympathy. Our choice is determined by what internal state we wish to reveal to the listener, by the impression we wish to leave with him.

When we change the referential meaning of the word ("passed away" comes to mean "died"), because we wish to make use of the expressive meaning of the word, and when the expressive meaning reveals that we wish to be sympathetic, kind, less blunt, considerate, etc., we are said to be using euphemism.

ATTENTION

Throughout the discussion of euphemism, stress the fact that people use euphemism because they think it is appropriate. It should be heavily stressed that in many ways, notably expository discourse, euphemism is regarded as highly inappropriate.

Usually we use euphemism when the situation calls for it (refer to opening example--death of friend's father), when the situation calls for us to express sympathy and consideration for others. Euphemism seems to involve the use of appropriate language in a situation which demands that we be sympathetic and considerate or that we use milder language, etc. Euphemism, then, is the substitution of a mild, appropriate term for one which might be inappropriate. What causes this type of substitution?

Important definition

ATTENTION

(Write on the board a summary of the answers: euphemism is caused by a sense of decency and propriety, by thoughtfulness, consideration of the feelings of others,etc.

FIRST REASON FOR USE OF EUPHEMISM

These examples or others should be drawn from the students, if possible.

Some euphemisms which occur in this way are:

"left us" for "died" (also "is gone," "departed")

"linen" for "drawers" or "underclothes" (also "lingerie," "flannels");

"a distortion of facts" for "lie"

"perspiration" for "sweat"

"under the influence of" for "drunk."

Sample Lecture

There is another very important reason for the use of euphemism. You are probably aware that in most religions there are strict rules against the name of the god or gods except in the proper situations (prayer, ceremony). In some primitive tribes other words are also not to be used. For example, the name of a dead person may not be uttered nor given to another person; or certain words with mystic or magical powers may not be used except by qualified persons during a ritual.

Second reason for use of euphemisms

This a fairly subtle question. Students may very well miss the mark. If so, the teacher can 'derive' the correct response from those given by the students by using leading questions.

6. Why are these restrictions placed upon the use of such words?

   (These restrictions or taboos exist because the speaker has confused the word with the thing (See pp. 4-7 this unit.) to speak the name of a dead person will supposedly evoke his ghost or to speak the name of an evil spirit will evoke its presence. The idea of using 'God's name in vain' is related, since the name will presumably bring punishment, i.e., the effect of the diety follows the use of his name.)

For obvious reasons, we cannot discuss at great length any of the euphemisms which replace word taboos, but we can mention a few of the euphemisms that you hear often, such as "gosh", "darn," "heck," etc.

ATTENTION

Conduct a brief inductive interview.

Still another reason exists for the use of euphemism. Language, it seems, like nature, will not permit a vacuum. When words change their meanings by means of degradation we have holes or vacuums left in the vocabularly; no suitable word exists, temporarily for the thing formerly named by the word which has become degraded, and the speaker finds it necessary to provide another word to take its place. A bookkeeper may call himself an "accountant" if he feels that "bookkeeper" has lost status through association with the expression, "to keep book" (a form of professional gambling, often illegal). In other words, "accountant" becomes a euphemism for "bookkeeper." In 1915, a real estate man became concerned about the bad publicity then being given to "real estate men," so he invented the name "realtor" to take its place. The original name became degraded through association with illegal operators, and so a new term came in to replace the degraded term. This form of euphemism is very much like a form of a different kind of change which we will study next in this unit.

Suggested Activity: Distribute Worksheet #2

I am going to give you a dittoed sheet with three columns marked on it. Notice that the first column is marked EUPHEMISM, the second REPLACES, the third PURPOSE. At the head of the sheet is a list of the three reasons for the use of euphemism. In the next day or two, listen to the conversations around you, to television or radio--particularly the advertisements--and list any euphemisms

that you hear. Place in the second column the word or words that are being replaced by the euphemism. In the third column place the number of the reason for that particular euphemism. Notice the example: "passed away" is the euphemism for "died" and is used for reason #1 (...sense of decency, etc.). We will discuss your results in class tomorrow (day after tomorrow, etc.)

Summary

(Summarize the three reasons for the use of euphemism and make certain that there is a minimum of confusion about them.)

Suggested Activity

After ample time has been given--one to three days--have students read examples from their sheets; discuss questionable items, re-explain terms or concepts as necessary, and in summary emphasize the social or interpersonal nature of language as it is evidenced by the use of euphemism.

Suggested Activity

A student may prepare two versions of a short speech --formal speech, dialogue, etc.--one of which uses no euphemisms wherever possible. The speech could then be presented to the class, to be followed by discussion of the different 'tone' which results from the absence/presence of the euphemism and the different "picture" of the speaker created by each speech.

WORKSHEET #2

Name _____

EUPHEMISMS

Three purposes for the use of euphemism: (Use number only below)

1. Sense of decency or propriety; respect for the feelings of others; desire not to hurt or embarrass another.

2. Word taboo; religious or superstitious restraint against use of the word.

3. Need for a replacement-word for another word which has become degraded and is no longer suitable.

EUPHEMISM	REPLACES	PURPOSE
Example: "Passed away"	"Died"	#1

HYPERBOLE

Suggested Introduction

In looking at examples of euphemism, we noted that the choice of euphemistic language is determined by the social situation and by the human desire to avoid the embarrassment or harm of another person. Continued use of euphemism causes a word to change its meaning. Another type of change in meaning occurs from still another peculiarity of human nature. Let's look at an example of this process in a television advertisement for a car sale (taken from a actual advertisement):

Place on board, underline each phrase as it is discussed.

"...sensational sale...fabulous bargains... absolutely stupendous...you'll be amazed..."

Let's look at some of the original meanings of some of these words:

"Sensational": "designed to produce an excited or violent emotion";

"Fabulous": "astonishing, incredible" ("astonishing: "that which deprives one of his senses"; "incredible": "unbelievable");

"Stupendous:" "that which causes stupor or strikes one senseless; amazing; astounding;"

"Absolutely": "completely, entirely, perfectly";

"Amazed": "to be astounded; to be overwhelmed with wonder" ("astounded": same as astonished").

In other words, the prospective car buyer, upon reaching the car lot where the sale is in progress, would be expected (according to the ad) to become <u>entirely</u> <u>and</u> <u>completely</u> <u>speechless</u>, <u>senseless</u>, <u>and</u> <u>emotionally</u> <u>over-whelmed</u>. Such a buyer could hardly be expected to speak to a salesman, discuss the car and the prices, select a car, and make financial arrangements. According to the ad

the buyer would be in no condition to buy a car. In fact, the salesman would probably have to put the senseless, speechless buyer in the careof a doctor.

Discussion

At this point, you are saying to yourselves, "That isn't what the advertiser meant when he used words like "stupendous," sensational," and so forth," and you are correct.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. What does he mean?

   (The buyer will be mildly surprised or pleased with the sale prices, etc.--place these words or their equivalents on the board next to the others.)

In other words, the advertiser us-s words which express very strong emotions or extreme and unusual conditions where he means mild emotions and natural, typical conditions. The words expressing strong emotions have changed in meaning and are assumed to indicate mild emotions. We usually call this use of strong words for mild conditions exaggeration. Another more technical word for exaggeration is hyperbole. Hyperbole, then, is the use of strong words which express strong emotions where the situation in fact calls for words which express mild emotions.

ATTENTION:
Important definition

Sample Discussion Question

2. What do you suppose happens to the meanings of these strong words when they are used in this manner again and again?

   (The strong words lose their original meanings and come to indicate milder feelings. In a sense, the words lose their vigor.)

If the students cannot answer this question directly, the teacher may wish to try another approach. He might begin by asking students how they respond to these words. Do they take the words at face value or do they tend to qualify their response? The teacher can then ask the students why they respond in the way they do.

In most cases students will hit on the notion that though they have frequently heard these terms used they have seldom experienced the emotional shock that the words imply.

Before we look at some more examples of hyperbole, let's ask an important question:

Sample Discussion Question

3. Why do speakers exaggerate?

Teacher may wish to ask leading questions to elicit this lengthy and detailed type of response.

(Responses will vary widely. Stress the idea that (1) speaker's emotions may give rise to hyperbole despite the fact that the situation doesn't merit strong expression; (2) exaggeration may place more importance on the speaker's message, thus making him appear more important--a means of gaining recognition but not the same as conscious lying. Try to get examples from the students for each of these ideas. For example, re #1: Girl A asks a friend, Girl B, to comment on A's new dress; B, desiring to please her friend, replies enthusiastically that the dress is "positively stunning"; neither the dress nor the friendly, informal situation may call for such strong language, but the girl's emotions cause her to use it.
Re #2: Boy A returns from the World's Fair and tells his friends that it was "out of this world, wonderful, and stupendous" despite the fact that he was at times very unimpressed or even bored with the Fair; his words, however, will cause others to envy him as a traveler who has seen things not seen by his listeners.

ATTENTION

Stress the fact that these causes of hyperbole are natural and human. All persons sometimes react to a situation with emotional, strong language, and certainly all persons want their speech to make themselves seem important to others. Hyperbole, like euphemism, reveals the significance of language as an interpersonal tool among humans.)

Examples of Hyperbole

The examples of hyperbole given here are in summary form and can be expanded by the teacher.

"Yea" (A.S. gea) was a simple affirmation of the first speaker's words ("As you say it"). When combined with A. S. swa ('so'), it became a stronger affirmative to be used for emphasis ('Just so!'; 'Exactly so!'). As the two words became more commonly used where not called for (hyperbole), the expression lost its vigor and came to

Examples of Hyperbole Continued

stand for the simple, mild affirmative formerly indicated by gea alone. At the same time, continued use changed the pronunciation: gea swa became slurred, the final vowel sound dropped off to form the weak ending, gese, and finally the modern "yes", which carries the mild meaning instead of the original strong meaning. (We now add to "yes" to emphasize it: "Yes sir!" or "Oh yes!").

"Charming" once had a literal, superstitious meaning of some strength, but over-use in an exaggerated manner has now caused it to mean the tame, "pleasing."

"Perfectly" is one of several absolute words which are added to relative adjectives to give them an absolute status ("perfectly horrid"; "absolutely nauseous"; "extremely objectionable"); continued exaggeration causes the entire expression to slip to a relative status, thus making the former absolute word lose its strength.

"Atrocious" meant originally "excessively and wantonly savage or cruel; heinously wicked," but its use as hyperbole has caused it to mean simply "very bad" as in "an antrocious color," "...painter," "...grin."

Summary: (Draw from students inductively.)

Summary should include these points:

1. Hyperbole or exaggeration arises from social situation where
   a. speaker uses language which fits his emotions but not the situation;
   b. exaggeration may enhance the words of the speaker, thus of the speaker himself;
   c. the speaker's occupation or residence will seem more important with the use of exaggerated title;
2. Continued use of the exaggerated expression in a situation which does not merit it will cause the expression to lose its vigor, thus leading to a change in meaning.

Suggested Activities

Students may wish to bring in examples of hyperbole from the sports pages of the local newspaper, from the yellow pages of the telephone directory, or from newspaper or television advertising. The examples may be discussed in class and may serve to clarify any points on which students are confused.

An optional or required writing assignment may be made in the form of two passages, one using hyperbole and the other using a journalistic style without hyperbole. Subjects should be varied, e.g., a description of the dresses, etc., observed at a wedding; a narrative summary of a baseball game, etc.

A sheet may be developed similar to that used for euphemisms, on which students record examples of hyperbole and the less-exaggerated terms which could have been used.

Sample Lecture-Discussion

Before we leave our discussion of euphemism a..d hyperbole we should discuss one very special example of the operation of these two kinds of change. This kind of change involves the way people talk about their jobs, their homes, their automobiles, etc. If you think for a minute about these things you'll realize that they are very important signs of the individual's place in our society, of his status. In fact, we call these things "status symbols." Because these things are important to us we sometimes use words to describe orname them which make them sound more important or better than they are. For example, if I buy a cheap Chevrolet, I don't refer to it as a cheap Chevrolet; I call it the Biscayne model. I don't own a small house or rent a small apartment; I own a one-bedroom rambler or rent an efficiency apartment.

This tendency to try to see ourselves in the best possible light has had its greatest effect on the names

Lecture Continued

we give to our jobs. Most of us don't even have jobs anymore; we have occupations. Similarly, profession once referred to a small number of occupations which required great skill, long years of education, etc., and were known for the high status they carried for their members. Today by means of this type of hyperbole, we have the "sales profession," the "plumbing profession." and so forth. By a similar process we now have "sanitary engineers" (garbage-collectors), "building superintendents" (janitors), "caterpillar engineers" (tractor driver), "landscape architects" (gardeners), "tree surgeon" (tree trimmer).

One of the reasons that these changes in terminology are of particular interest to us at this moment is that they can be classified as either euphemism or hyperbole.

Sample Discussion Questions

1. In what sense can these changes be considered as hyperbole?

   (They tend to give an exaggerated or magnified status to the things they name, thus enhancing the position or status of the person who has the things in question, or is employed in the occupation in question.)

2. In what sense can these changes be considered as euphemism?

   (They tend to be substitutions for other terms which would seem offensive and condescending. That is, they are attempts to suggest that those who own certain types or things or are employed in certain occupations enjoy a status similar to that enjoyed by the more privileged groups in our society.)

It is important for the teacher to note at this point that most of the people who are in the lower status groups of the society are probably quite aware of thier status and are not usually deluded by or trying to delude others by using these euphemistic terms. In a sense these terms are in most cases a token gesture. The teacher might raise the question of why such token gestures are necessary in human interaction.

Summary

H. L. Mencken, a well-known essayist and student of American English, has written an article discussing the growth of the special terminology we have been talking about. I would like to have you read the essay. It was last revised in 1936, and since that time some of the words that Mencken discusses have undergone further shifting. I would like you to try to find as many terms as you can which Mencken lists as euphemisms, and which we have classified as being examples of a combination of euphemism and hyperbole, that may have been supplanted by new euphemisms and hyperboles since 1936.

TEACHER NOTE: The Mencken article can be found in Introductory Readings on Language (N.Y.: Holt,Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1962), pp. 135-145.

Examples of change

Morticians are now grief counselors. Caskets are now units. Beauticians are beauty operators. Advertising agent are motivation analysts or consumer analysts. Loan offices are loan agencies. Delinquency is maladjustment. Movie-cathedrals have become movie-palaces. Reformatories have become correctional institutions. County homes are residences for retired persons. Used cars have become second cars, etc.

The teacher will need to assist students in noticing these changes. Leading questions will usually elicit the newer terms.

Suggested Activity

Read aloud or distribute copies of Mark Twain's "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral." The text can be found in Essays on Language and Usage, ed. Leonard F. Dean and Kenneth G. Wilson (N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 302-305. From the beginning to the paragraph beginning with "Now you can talk!...Let's start fresh..." these questions can be raised:

Discussion Questions

1. What is the first speaker saying, in simplified form?

   (I'm looking for a clergyman.)

2. What is second speaker saying, in simplified form?

   (I am a clergyman.)

3. Why do the two speakers take so long before understanding what the other means?

   (Neither understands the language of the other.)

4. What might we call the language of the first speaker?

   (Slang--highly specialized as a card player might use.)

5. What are some of the examples of hyperbole used by the second speaker which confuse the first speaker?

   ("...shepherd in charge...spiritual adviser...")

6. Have you had similar experiences with doctors, mechanics, etc.?

NOTE: The remainder of this selection contains several examples of euphemism ("...has departed to that mysterious country. ..Assist at the obsequies..." etc.) which the students may wish to pick out and discuss.

MAY BE OMITTED FOR LESS ABLE STUDENTS

This excerpt can give rise to a question which is not necessarily a part of this unit and may be considered optional: Which speaker is using correct expression here? (Neither--both speakers use a vocabulary which is strange to the other, and each has difficulty in adjusting his vocabulary so that it will fit the situation and make sense to the other person. Each has too narrow a vocabulary--even the parson, despite his obvious knowledge of erudite words.)

Sample Introduction

Folk Etymology

Before we try to tie up our discussion of the ways that we can change the meanings of words, we should talk about one rather unusual type of change. Most of us, although we don't think about it very often, are really very interested in words and what they mean. If

you think for a minute about time many of us spend on word games like crossword puzzles, Hangman, Password, and Scrabble, you'll see what I mean. This natural interest in words is the major cause of the type of change that we are going to discuss now.

At this point use transparency #2, the Hi & Lois comic strip, on the overhead projector. (See Appendix)

Discussion while viewing transparency.

Let's look at an example of playing games with words.

1. What are the writers of this comic strip trying to do in playing with words in this way?

   (They are trying to show us how some made-up words seem more appropriate to certain circumstances than words which already exist.)

2. Are the new words completely different from the words they are intended to replace?

   (No, they are in fact quite similar to the words they replace.)

3. What makes the game interesting and funny?

   (The very fact that the new words which seem so much more appropriate differ so little from the words that already exist.)

4. Do you think that any of these terms might become a part of our language?

Students should be allowed to discuss the pro's and con's of this question for a time. Emphasis should be placed on getting students to give reasons for their judgments. The teacher should eventually be able to draw a conclusion somewhat like the one indicated.

   (We really don't seem to be able to agree as to whether or not these terms might become part of our language, and actually it doesn't seem to matter if they do or don't. What interests me are the reasons that you have been offering to support your viewpoints. I think we might be able to agree about them.

5. If these terms ever were adopted, why would they be adopted?

   (Because of their appropriateness.)

6. And what is the major obstacle that would prevent their adoption?

   (They aren't appropriate enough or similar enough to cause their adoption.)

Keeping these ideas in mind let's look at changes in our words that have taken place. Perhaps we'll find that our word game isn't as far-fetched as it may seem.

Write on the blackboard: hangnail, belfry, travelers'rod, pantry

7. Can you detect any ideas in the parts of these words that might give us some hints at the way they got their current meanings?

(Accept any answer.)

Summary

Depending on the comprehensiveness and date of publication of the dictionary that the students are using, they may experience difficulty with the term "traveler's rod." If they do, have them check the entries for "traveler" and "traverse rod."

Now that we've made some guesses about the histories or etymologies of these words, let's turn to our dictionaries to find out what we can about the actual histories of the words.

Our guesses were not very good were they?

Let's not dismiss them too lightly, however. If we compare them to the actual histories of the words, and if we think about the word game we were discussing earlier we can see that at times at least the term that sounds more appropriate does replace the original term.

Discussion and Summary

8. How does this notion help to explain the present forms of "hangnail" and "traveler's rod?"

Originally a "hangnail" was a painful finger nail. Since the pain was caused by a piece of hanging nail the new term developed. The "traverse rod" was a rod on which drapes "traveled" so it became the "traveler's rod.")

Similarly, the belfry, originally a tower, became a tower where bells are hung, and the pantry, originally a place where bread was kept, became a place where pans were kept. In all of these cases then the appropriateness the changed forms was sufficient to result in either a new form or a new meaning for the old term. This type

ATTENTION

Emphasize that two kinds of change are possible: the form of the word or the meaning of the word may change.

of change is called folk etymology.

Guesses about the histories of words or about their relationships to other words don't always lead to change. A short selection from Charlton Laird's The Miracle of Language will provide some examples of cases where inappropriateness or dissimilarity prevented change. It will also demonstrate the extremes to which folk etymology can be and is carried.

TEACHER NOTE: If possible, distribute copies of Laird's "Folk Etymology, or Every Man A Lexicographer," found in The Miracle of Language (Greenwich, Connecticut: Faucett Publications 1953.)

Suggested Activity

Have students compose some new words like the ones found in the comic strip used at the beginning of the lesson. Ask them to explain their reasons for thinking the new terms more appropriate than existing terms.

Suggested Activity
For More Able Students

MAY BE OMITTED FOR
LESS ABLE STUDENTS

Have students write a short paper on the following topic: "In the selection that you read by Mr. Laird, folk etymologies for "gandy" and "gringo" are discussed. These etymologies are probably as far-fetched as any you might encounter. Nonetheless, they do share characterisitcs with some folk etymologies which have affected the form or meaning of words. Discuss these characterisitcs with specific reference to at least one term that has been influenced by folk etymology.

Distribute Excerpt # 6

MAY BE OMITTED FOR
LESS ABLE STUDENTS

Provide students with the list of folk etymologies for th word Yankee taken from Mencken's The American Language: Supplement 1. Ask them to choose the etymology they thin most accurate, and to write a brief paper supporting their choice. Then have students exchange papers and write one paragraph evaluations of the reasoning in the paper they read. The MPEC unit on argumentation may help with this exercise. Finally investigate the actual history of the term as reported by Mencken. Discuss then any differences that the students can note between the actual and supposed histories.

Distribute Excerpt #7

Final Examination - Key indicated in Appendix.

UNIT 902 - FINAL EXAM

Name _____

I. Fill in the blanks:

1. Degradation and elevation are types of change in meaning which are closely related to changes in the _____ which a society assigns to the things name.

2. Folk etymology demonstrates the continuing _____ that most people have in the language they speak.

3. Our study of the meanings of words demonstrates clearly that language does _____.

4. Radiation is the process that accounts for the _____ of the m of a given word.

5. Hyperbole is another name for _____.

6. One of the causes of euphemism is the fact that society places _____ on the use of words that refer to the deity or to the dead.

7. The term "secondary radiation" refers to the fact that a radiated _____ _____ of a given term can undergo still further radiation.

8. The cowboy and the minister use many euphemisms and hyperboles in talking with each other. On result of this is that they cannot _____ each other.

9. In discussing degradation we found that changes in _____ conventions can cause a word to degrade in its meaning.

10. The facts which determine whether or not a word produced as a result of folk etymology is adopted are its _____ and its similarity to existing forms.

II. Short Essay Questions:
Write one paragraph answers. Spend about 15 min. on each question. Make sure you have provided examples to support your conclusion.

1. How are changes in the meanings of words related to changes in the values of the society? (Be sure to discuss euphemism and hyperbole as well as degradation and elevation.)

2. You'll remember that earlier this year we talked about metaphor. Metaphor we said is an attempt to explain something in terms of something else. How does this concept help to explain the process of radiation?

3. We have also recently discussed the concept of analogy. An analogy we said was an attempt to point out the similarities between two things usually considered dissimilar. You'll also remember that we said, at that time, that such a comparison had to be closely scrutinized since frequently it proves to be false or misleading. How do these ideas help to explain the process of folk etymology?

Alternative question for
use with more able students:

3A. In discussing the three types of changes in the meanings of words, degradation, elevation, and euphemism, we have found that the fact that people tend to confuse or equate words and the things that words name helps to explain changes in the meanings of words. How does this notion help to explain the process of folk etymology?

FOR CLASSROOM USE

Greenough, James Bradstreet and George Lyman Kittredge. Words and Their Ways In English Speech. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961, (Paper)

"Explores all facets of the commonplace miracle of articulated speech." One of the few sources to include helpful analysis and useful examples for so many aspects of language use.

Robertson, Stuart and Frederic C. Cassidy. The Development of Modern English. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961.

While the original edition came out in 1934, this text remains helpful as a survey of all important facets of language history and use. Ch. 9, "Changing Meanings and Values of Words" offers useful definitions and examples.

Sturtevant, E. H. An Introduction to Linguistic Science. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963.

A short survey of the "origin, development, and behavior of language, and he examines those aspects of language that link linguistic science to anthropology, social studies, and mathematics."

Has an interesting two and one-half page section on folk etymology.

Weekly, Ernest. The Romance of Words. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1961. (Paper)

Paced with examples which are drawn mostly from literary sources unfamiliar to most students. Leans heavily on words of foreign derivation. Offers very little by way of lucid definition of the nature of the language change under consideration. I bought the book because the binding is sturdy and the cover is very, very pretty. (Paper)

FOR REFERENCE:

Funk, Wilfred. Word Origins and Their Romantic Stories. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1950.

Done up by the lexicographer who helps Reader's Digest subscribers increase their word power. Your shelf of condensed books is truly incomplete without this book on the jacket of which is asked: "PRESTIGE: Who would guess that this respectful term once meant a magician's trick? See why on page 67." Is organized according to sociologically familiar areas such as "Where Words About Human Beings Come From," and "Word Stories of the Boudoir and the Men's Dressing Room." GET ONE!

Laird, Charlton. The Miracle of Language. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett, Publications, Inc., 1953.

Short section on folk etymology in Chapter 5.

McKnight, George H. English Words and Their Backgrounds. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1923.

Contains several good chapters dealing with the specific changes covered in the present unit.

Sturtevant, E. H. Linguistic Change. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917.

Contains several good chapters dealing with the specific changes covered in the present unit.

Unit 902 Examination Key

Key For Blanks

1. status, value, worth, etc.
2. interest
3. change
4. extension, multiplication, expansion, etc.
5. exaggeration
6. restrictions
7. meaning
8. understand
9. literary
10. appropriateness

Outline of Short Essay Answers

Note: The outlines of answers included here represent idealizations that many students will not achieve. The outlines are intended only as guides for the teacher's judgment.

1. ...
   A. All of the types of change mentioned can be related directly to the emergence of new patterns in the society or the culture.
      1. Change from rural to urban living.
         a. Degradation of terms related to farmers and farming.
         b. Elevation of terms related to city life.
         c. Euphemisms for farming and farm related activities and for certain low status urban occupations.
         d. Hyperboles used in support of and/or in attack on farm living.
   B. Changes in terminology, in turn affect the attitudes of the society.
      1. Change from rural to urban living.
         a. New terminology tends to glorify urban life.
         b. New terminology tends to suggest that rural life is in one of three categories.
            1) Part of the good old days.
            2) A necessary but very difficult way of living.
            3) A unsophisticated and boorish existence.

2. ...
   A. The process of radiation involves the acquisition of new meanings by a given term.

      1. The term "foot" takes on a new meaning, for example, when encountered in a phrase like the "foot of a mountain."

   B. Metaphor is an attempt to explain something in terms of something else.

      1. The phrase "the foot of the mountain" was originally a metaphor attempting to explain the structure of a mountain in terms of the structure of the human body.

   C. Metaphor, therefore, can lead to the acquisition of new meanings by a given term.

      1. The new meaning of "foot" found in the phrase "the foot of the mountain" is a meaning acquired through metaphor.

3. ...
   A. Folk etymology involves changing the meaning or form of a word so as to make it more appropriate for naming the thing to which it refers.

      1. "Pantry" comes to refer to the place where pans are stored or "traverse rod" becomes a traveler's rod.

   B. Analogy involves noting the similarities between dissimilar things.

      1. Since the first syllable of "pantry" is "pan" we are reminded of the meaning of that combination of sounds in English. Since drapes "travel" on "traverse rods" we are reminded of similarity of the sounds of these two terms.

   C. Even though analogies are not always completely true, they are capable of effecting our actions.

      1. Since the sound of "pantry" suggests "pans" the meaning of the term changes.

      2. Since traveler's and traverse sound similar and since travelers seems more appropriate the form of the term changes.

3A. ...
   A. Folk etymology involves the notion that the word which names a thing should be appropriate to the nature of the thing.

      1. The "belfry" should be a place where bells are hung because the first syllable of the word is "bell."

   B. The confusion between the word and the thing usually involves the assumption that the word and the thing are equivalent.

      1. The word "bell" is the same thing as a bell. The word "belfry" is the same as the thing belfry.

C. The confusion between the word and the thing leads to the assumption that the word should be appropriate to the thing it names, hence to folk etymology.

1. The "belfry" becomes a place where "bells" are hung.

NOTE: This test will achieve a maximum usefulness only if it is used as the basis for a class review and summary. After the examinations have been graded the teacher should be able to conduct an inductive classroom session using the outlined answers as a basis. The questions where student performance is lowest will indicate where matters should be stressed.